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Rural Scenery Narrative and Field Experiences

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Summary

Farmers create rural scenery by farming agricultural land. Through this work they also create their own particular narratives of rural scenery, from memories of experiences in their rural area which we call a field. In this way each narrative seems to differ according to personal experience or the particular environment in each field. A rural scenery narrative becomes the narrative of everyone as the narration is repeated, and begins to influence or control the behavior of all members in a rural society. We call this a normative scenery narrative. Normative scenery narratives will differ according to the various experiences of farmers in rural fields. This paper aims to demonstrate how scenery narratives differ as a result of different field experiences in a case study of old Otamachi in Akita Prefecture, Japan.

Farmers create rural scenery by producing agricultural products from farmland through combinations of various types of work, and by adjusting to changes in the natural and social environment. In this way, accumulations of farmers' work experiences, and the physical actions of production, in the rural field have created recent rural scenery and scenery narratives. However, few studies have discussed the relationship between field experiences and a rural scenery narrative.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss, firstly, how farmers' scenery narratives differ according to their different field experiences caused by different farmland environments, and, secondly, how a narrative becomes the narrative of everyone as it is repeated many times. In other words, a narrative becomes the norm, and influences or controls the behavior of all members of rural society.

In the next section, we modify Kitaro Nishida's theory of environment to help explain the theory of scenery. Then we discuss the concept of the scenery narrative by integrating it with Keiichi Noe's narrative theory. In the third section, we discuss the theoretical relationship between work experiences in the

field and a scenery narrative. Finally, we develop a hypothesis from the narrative theory of scenery and verify it in a case study.

Scenery narrative

This chapter reviews Hasebe's discussion of scenery narrative (Hasebe, 2005a, 2005b).^{*1} We will attempt to explain the creation of scenery from Kitaro Nishida's point of view, but we will apply the logic of Masamichi Nakajima's discussion on the establishment of self. We rely on Nakajima's logic because of his explanation of the establishment of self according to the modern European view^{*2}.

Nishida explained that a human as an animal is not only created by the environment, but also creates the environment subjectively^{*3}. The environment as the universe creates a human as the individual by denying itself. A human creates the environment by denying him/herself. This idea is an application of Nishida's thinking on 'nothingness', to the relationship between the environment and a human. We apply this framework of mutual control presented by Nishida to the creation of scenery that is part of the environment. We suggest that the present 'scenery' world contains both scenery and society. We can suggest a past scenery world in the same way. A scenery world is a nested structure containing a society, which in turn contains humans. Humans are in a mutual control relationship with a scenery world through society. In our simple model, it is assumed that a society consists of three persons, that is, I, the other, a third party (the other's other).

According to Nishida's argument, the human body is an historical body because a human as an individual creates a scenery world by historical action using his/her body^{*4}. A scenery world creates a human and is created by a human. Because of this mutual interaction, a scenery world is also an historical body. According to Yoshimichi Nakajima's discussion on the establishment of self ('I'), self is established by remembering the past and connecting 'I' in the present with 'I' in the past. Nakajima's logic can be applied to help explain the establishment of a scenery world, by connecting present and past scenery worlds. We call this an historical scenery world.

We introduce the concept of the scenery narrative by applying Keiichi Noe's narrative theory^{*5}. Noe differentiates a story from a narrative. The former is a fact and the latter is the discourse that is created through the action of language. By translating Noe's discussion to an historical scenery world, we can argue that a human creates his narrative on scenery by arranging events in a certain context. The background of this explanation is the theory on remembrance of the past, discussed by Shozo Omori (Omori, 1996).

Creation of scenery corresponds to 'action intuition' (*koui-teki chokkan*),

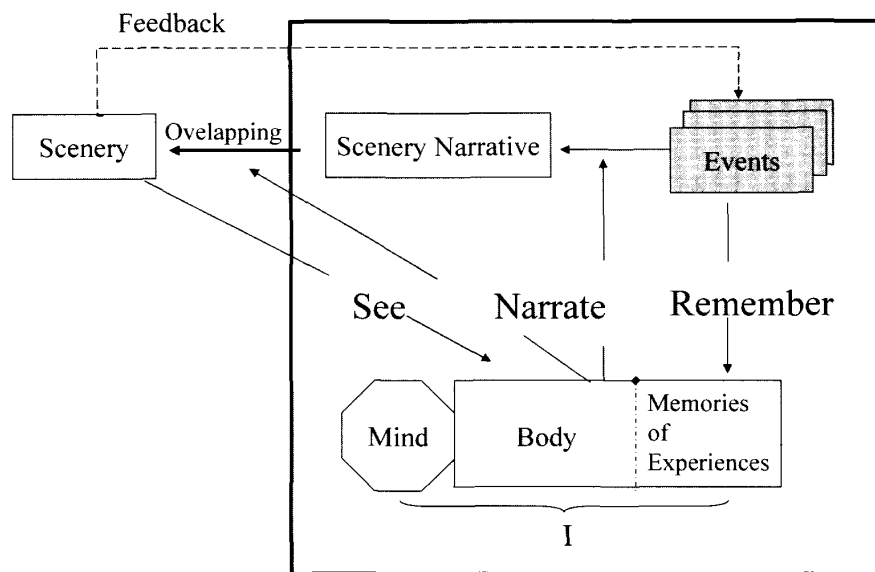


FIG. 1. Creation of a Scenery Narrative

which is an important concept from Kitarou Nishida. Nishida established this concept by combining creating (action) with seeing (intuition). Action intuition means integration between body (subject) and scenery (object). Yasuo Yuasa explains that the body has subjectivity to see, and objectivity to be shown (Yuasa, 1991). In the creation of scenery (action), the body as a subject works actively. This effort means subjectivity of the body. Seeing scenery (intuition) means interpreting scenery actively.

Each narrative is recreated by new interpretation, because various events occur as a result of interaction between a human and scenery and, possibly, as a result of the body's memories of events (episodic memories). Figure 1 shows the creation of scenery from the viewpoint of 'I' as the individual^{*6}, and how creating a scenery narrative by observing scenery represents the action intuition of Nishida. There are two types of creation. Firstly, we will create a scenery narrative by retrieving memories of events in the body. Secondly, we will overlap a scenery narrative on a particular scene.

Differentiation of scenery narratives caused by field experiences

We will discuss the relationship between work experiences in a rural field and a rural scenery narrative.

We assume that there are two districts, each with a different type of paddy field in a rice-producing area.

(1) New reclaimed paddy field

Poor water conditions resulted in wastelands. Wastelands were reclaimed to make paddy fields because new water canals had been constructed during a

big reclamation project.

(2) Old reclaimed paddy field

Paddy fields were reclaimed in earlier times because of good water conditions.

Farmers who live in different districts have different field experiences. Farmers in the district of the newly reclaimed paddy field, reclaimed wastelands into paddy fields. Through cultivation, they could re-make paddy fields and add fertility to the soil. Farmers in the district of newly reclaimed paddy field also had to face other difficult challenges. In contrast, farmers in the district of the old reclaimed paddy field could maintain average production levels through conventional farming. These experiences show how different types of work and different accumulations of events can create a scenery narrative. Farmers do not simply create rice through agricultural work; in a much more general sense, they also create rural scenery by farming.

Concluding from this discussion, we can say that :

(A) Scenery narratives are different according to different field experiences.

Farmers tell their narratives according to their field work experiences. Each individual's narrative is integrated into a family's narrative.

Next, we consider change over time. We focus on repeating the narration of a scenery narrative, and exploring a family's scenery narrative. A farmer is the narrator. He is married and is a core worker in rice production (we present him as "I" below).

My parents had experience of working to reclaim wastelands. They told their narrative based on their experiences as they reclaimed land. They also managed to change the soils. During my childhood, I observed this hard work by my parents. Indeed I was able to help them sometimes. Now I am a manager of our farm. Agricultural work is now less labor intensive because of mechanization. I narrate my scenery narrative by remembering childhood experiences, and combining these with recent experiences of agricultural work. My recent experience, my memories of my parents' experiences of reclamation and changing soils, and what I remember from being told by my parents, are all reflected in the creation of my narrative. In other words, my narrative is established by repeating my parents' narrative. My children's narratives are established in the same way. My family's scenery narrative is repeated many times, and has been handed down from my parents to me, and from me to my children, and is accepted as the family's history.

A rural scenery narrative is not narrated by one person or one family, but also by neighbors. The rural scenery narrative of a group of neighbors was more easily created when there was a mutual aid system for agricultural work, because everyone created rural scenery by working together. Like the scenery narrative

of a family, the scenery narrative of a district is repeated and continued over time. Rural residents accept it as the district's history. We can sum up this discussion as follows :

(B) A scenery narrative of a family or a district is narrated as mutual language action and becomes the narrative of everyone (=history).

Differentiation of normative scenery narratives caused by field experience

1. Behavior controlled by a normative scenery narrative

Combining (A) with (B), we extract this statement.

(C) A different scenery narrative (=history) is repeated in each family or district where people experienced different types of field work.

People who narrate the same narrative have the same identity*7. A scenery narrative becomes the norm of everyone, through repetition of narration, and controls all behavior. We call it a normative scenery narrative.

From the preceding discussion, we propose the next hypothesis.

(D) There is a different normative scenery narrative in each family, or in each district where people experienced different types of field work, and this narrative controls members' behavior.

This hypothesis will be verified in the experimental hearing survey in the next section.

2. Existence of normative scenery narrative

We selected old Otamachi in Akita Prefecture (now merged with Daisen City) to analyze hypothesis (D). The building of the Tazawa-Sosui Canal allowed wastelands to be converted to paddy fields. Since 1937 about 3,500 ha of paddy fields have been reclaimed by the national reclamation project. Those new paddy fields were added to Senboku Plain, and became part of the most productive area in Akita Prefecture. A new reclamation project was begun in 1955 when Otamachi was established. Reclamation works became easier once bulldozers could be used. New paddy fields were introduced in the eastern part of the town.

Because of leakage of water after reclamation, the paddy field had to be repaired. Extensive work was needed to improve the soil, because the productivity of the newly reclaimed paddy field was low. Labor was intensive in this area. Therefore, field work experiences differed between the new reclaimed district and the old reclaimed district.

To analyze hypothesis (D), we selected nine farmers in the new reclaimed district, and five farmers in the old reclaimed district. The main questions in the interviews were:

- (a) What kind of strains on the body were experienced when you worked in farming for the first time?
- (b) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural life?
- (c) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural experience in childhood (before fifteen years old)?
- (d) How is the agricultural land maintained?

Six out of nine farmers in the newly reclaimed district answered that 'it was hard', and three farmers answered 'it was not easy and not hard' (I grew accustomed to the hard work because no easy work was available) to question (a) (See Table 1). All five farmers in the old reclaimed district answered 'it was hard' (See Table 2). We cannot conclude that there is a difference between the two groups (in different districts), because hard work was the same for everybody in the newly reclaimed district, although there were farmers who answered 'it was not easy and not hard'. Because question (a) is limited to a particular time, it has only a minor effect on the creation of a normative scenery narrative.

Answers to question (b) from nine farmers in the newly reclaimed district were: 'mechanization', 'acreage allotment', 'increase in rice price' and 'cool summer damage'. The answers of five farmers in the old reclaimed district were: 'mechanization', 'cooperative work (yui)', 'acreage allotment'. There is no difference between the two groups (in different districts).

The answers of seven farmers to question (c) in the newly reclaimed district were: 'agricultural works'. One farmer answered 'I had no experience with agricultural works because of club activities in school'. All five farmers in the old reclaimed district answered 'agricultural works'. Additionally, three of the five farmers stressed 'cooperative work'. Cooperative work was important among intensive labor. In conclusion, 'agricultural works' were important for all respondents except one in both districts.

There were no differences in answers to (a)-(c) between the two districts. However, there were different answers to question (d). First we checked the answers of farmers in the newly reclaimed district. Seven farmers answered 'I will continue with agriculture' or 'I don't want to stop cultivating'. One farmer answered 'I must give up agriculture'. Another one answered 'I must care for my elderly mother though I want to continue agriculture by myself'. Most respondents in the newly reclaimed district want to maintain agricultural land. In contrast, the answers of respondents in the old reclaimed district were different. Two farmers answered 'I will continue cultivating' and 'While I am healthy, I never want to leave it to a stranger'. The other two answered 'I don't care even if I have to sell a rice field' and 'Renouncing cultivation altogether remains a last

Table 1 Results of interviews in a newly reclaimed district (I)

No.	Age	Sex	Area	(a) Burden on body when you worked in farming for the first time	(b) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural life?	(c) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural experience in childhood (before fifteen years old)?	(d) Maintenance of agricultural land
1	71	M	New reclaimed	It was not easy and not hard (refer to the text).	National reclamation was purchased and settled so that I could marry and inherit a house. When I went to work away from home and took charge of the burden of the reclaimed land. These were expected things.	Enjoyment of working with crops.	I must give up agriculture. Most villagers have farms larger than 4 ha. Most villagers don't presume to work under a system of village agriculture. I have only 1.8 ha, and I can not recommend that my son be my successor. Rice growing will stop in ten years.
2	72	M	New reclaimed	It was not easy and not hard.	The price of rice rose freely. The achievement of the side business (transport industry) was the best at that time. After that, the price of rice fell rapidly.	The land that was wilderness changed into rice fields according to Tazawa-sosui reclamation project.	While I can continue, I want to own it. A son may not necessarily become a successor. I want to leave my agricultural land to a big farmer because I am in a small farmer.
3	43	F	New reclaimed	It was hard.	Suffering damage from harmful insects and cool summer damage just when agriculture was succeeding, and purchasing a machine to take countermeasures. It was hard.	Enjoying life in the rice field. The mechanization of work in the advanced growing period. The family who used mechanization early was proud. When my parents left agriculture I wanted to carry on.	I will continue working in agriculture, though I won't increase my agricultural land. My forty-year-old son believes that he will inherit my house. My son has been working in the rice field since childhood. A person in the neighborhood is ready to do his alone for more than 4 ha.

Table 1 Results of interviews in a newly reclaimed district (2)

No.	Age	Sex	Area	(a) Burden on body when you worked in farming for the first time	(b) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural life?	(c) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural experience in childhood (before fifteen years old)?	(d) Maintenance of agricultural land
4	66	M	New reclaimed	It was hard.	Agricultural mechanization. The progress that one experienced with improvements in farm machinery. Cultivator introduction in 1955 to 1965.	I crouched down in the rice field and weeded. I did rice planting for twelve hours from 6 o'clock in the morning until 6 in the evening. A child worked with Yui to help with manpower.	Possession continues while I can work. I acquired the land when agricultural land was expensive. I don't want to sell it, because I had such difficulty with this land, and because I built it up.
5	54	M	New reclaimed	It was hard.	A policy of acreage allotment was started just when I tried to do my best in agriculture. I couldn't expand the area under rice in stony fields, and had difficulty in making a living.	Crop work is often supervised by an eldest son working with the youngest child. All crop work was manual. I thought that it was natural that an eldest son succeeded a farmer.	I can't say to my son-in-law (my daughter's husband) that he should live as a peasant. I hope that he will continue to grow rice and manage agricultural land. I may ask a stranger to control the agricultural land. I think that this son's life comes first.
6	41	M	New reclaimed	It was hard.	Not only myself but my parents are doing crop work in the center even now.	Yui (Cooperative work) in the village.	I will continue for the time being. Until a machine breaks, agriculture continues. Though I think about trust, I don't want to stop cultivation, and don't want to sell agricultural land after that.

Table 1 Results of interviews in a newly reclaimed district (3)

No.	Age	Sex	Area	(a) Burden on body when you worked in farming for the first time	(b) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural life?	(c) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural experience in childhood (before fifteen years old)?	(d) Maintenance of agricultural land
7	43	M	New reclaimed	It was not easy and not hard.	A rise in the price of rice, although harvests decreased markedly because of cool summer damage. The fact that life could be maintained by agricultural mutual aid.	I had no experience with agricultural work because of club activities in school.	I want to expand the size of the business. There is farm machinery, which would become part of the share of the branch family. I don't want cultivation stopped on the agricultural land that my ancestors cultivated so successfully. I will continue to do crop work while I can.
8	64	F	New reclaimed	It was hard.	When a cultivator was used for the first time. When it was cold, an engine wouldn't start, and there were many stones, and a cultivator couldn't work very well in a rice field. But only one other person used a cultivator, and that was a woman.	I helped with crop work since I was a junior high school student.	I must care for my old mother though I want to continue agriculture by myself. Because my old mother dislikes the nursing and personal care facility, she cannot disagree with me. The son who loses his job and stays at home fails to gain agricultural experience
9	61	M	New reclaimed	It was hard.	When reclamation was finished, a policy of acreage allotment soon began. Reclamation work is also a business from the old days.	My impression of crop work isn't especially lasting because it was natural. There was a rest from crop work at least at the time of elementary school.	I have been entrusted with agriculture by the machine use association. The allotted charge of following acreage allotment is expensive, and exceeds farm rent income. The incentive to expand on a reasonable scale is obstructed.

Table 2 Results of interviews in an old reclaimed district (1)

No.	Age	Sex	Area	(a) Burden on body when you worked in farming for the first time	(b) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural life?	(c) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural experience in childhood (before fifteen years old)?	(d) Maintenance of agricultural land
10	59	M	Old reclaimed	It was hard.	Mechanization proceeded and crop work became easy. It felt like doing agriculture by mechanization.	The fact that rice planting was a manual operation.	While I am healthy, I never want to leave it to a stranger. I think this feeling is widespread in all of the villages.
11	66	M	Old reclaimed	It was hard.	Nothing.	Farmers were organized naturally. There was only cultivator long ago. I wasn't good at agriculture without Yui (Cooperative work).	I don't care even if I have to sell a rice field. The levy money for land improvement is expensive. Growing rice is with a deficit is better than giving up, and only paying levy money. While I am alive, my son doesn't think that agricultural land should be sold.
12	71	M	Old reclaimed	It was hard.	Yui's work of rice planting. The peasant's life leaves a deep impression.	Rice planting and rice reaping took more than twenty days. My waist was painful.	Income and costs discourage rice growing. I don't care even if I sell agricultural land to someone temporarily, although that means consigning to a stranger, after much effort at maintenance. Renouncing cultivation altogether remains a last choice, too.

Table 2 Results of interviews in an old reclaimed district (2)

No.	Age	Sex	Area	(a) Burden on body when you worked in farming for the first time	(b) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural life?	(c) What is the most impressive memory in your agricultural experience in childhood (before fifteen years old)?	(d) Maintenance of agricultural land
13	58	M	Old reclaimed	It was hard.	<p>Acreage allotment began the moment I left agricultural high school. I may have given up agriculture if agrotechnology and also farm management had not been learned.</p>	<p>The age of Yui. It was pleasant to listen to a story when older sisters gathered in the rest period.</p>	<p>The future seems totally uncertain. I don't want to damage agricultural land. That is a feeling from childhood. A farmer inside the village is a part time farmer who has a second job. Agriculture should not be done with voluntary labor.</p>
14	57	M	Old reclaimed	It was hard.	<p>Compost was carried by sled in winter. Snow melted, and compost became a mountain in spring. The original scenery of agriculture is not seen now.</p>	<p>Rice planting Yui work has a woman at the center. Autumn work was very difficult because of the drying sun.</p>	<p>I will continue cultivation. But this scale of work is limited under private management. I want to make a corporation, which means producing on a 40 ha scale. I think that those who have a sense of "This is my land" nowadays, will not be able to lower production costs. I think that I should get rid of such a sense, early.</p>

resort'. Another one answered 'The future seems totally uncertain'.

The answers to question (d) support hypothesis (D). The scenery narrative depended on the hard field work experiences of reclaiming paddy fields in the newly reclaimed district. Therefore, a normative scenery narrative that includes reclaiming work, influences farmers' answers on the maintenance of agricultural land. In contrast, there is no such normative scenery narrative in the old reclaimed district. The lack of a normative scenery narrative was reflected in the negative or passive answers on the maintenance of agricultural land.

Conclusion

Farmers narrate different scenery narratives according to their different work experiences in paddy fields (as their fields). Furthermore, farmers' narratives become the norm after repeated narration, and influence farmers' behavior in a rural area. Our hypothesis was that there is a different normative scenery narrative in each family, or district where people experience different types of field work, which influences members' behavior. We verified this hypothesis in a case study.

In the second section, we introduced the concept of a rural scenery narrative by combining Kitatou Nishida's theory of scenery (modified by his theory of environment) with Keiichi Noe's narrative theory. The third section showed that scenery narratives narrated by persons in a family or a district differed according to different work experiences in paddy fields. In the fourth section, we established the hypothesis stated above. We verified the hypothesis in the case of old Otamachi in Akita Prefecture. We selected two types of district, one where new paddy fields were reclaimed in the national Tazawa-Sosui canal reclamation project, and the other where rice farming had already been practiced in reclaimed paddy fields. We tried an experimental interview survey to verify the hypothesis. The result shows that there is a scenery narrative (=history) incorporated in reclaiming work experiences, which acts as the norm to control farmers' behavior when maintaining their agricultural land in a newly reclaimed district.

The broad conclusion of this paper is that the existence of specific field work experiences in agriculture affects the creation of a rural scenery narrative. This type of narrative becomes everyone's narrative (=history) through repeated telling, and has the role of a general norm for all. The result of the interview survey suggests that the narrative of the parent generations, which is related to work experiences, affects the narrative of their children. Therefore, people should focus on co-ownership of the narrative between generations in order to be able to have effective discussions on the maintenance and management of agricultural land.

Note

- 1) The best reference on the narrative theory of history is from Kashima's *The History as Possibility*, published recently (Kashima, 2006).
- 2) The discussion on the establishment of self is based on Nakajima's argument in *The Secret of "I"* (Nakajima, 2002).
- 3) We referred to Ueda's *Selected Philosophical Papers of Kitaro Nishida* (Ueda ed., 2001) on Kitarou Nishida's theory of environment. We also referred to Kosaka's *The Thought of Kitaro Nishida* (Kosaka, 2002) on the relation between Kitarou Nishida's philosophy and the theory of environment. According to Kakuda, there are no discussions on the theory of scenery in Nishida's works (Kakuda, 2001). Therefore, Hasebe extended Kitarou Nishida's theory of environment to the theory of scenery (Hasebe, 2007) based on Yuasa's *The Body* (Yuasa, 1991).
- 4) We referred to "Logic and Life" and "Action Intuition" in Ueda's *Selected Philosophical Papers of Kitaro Nishida* (Ueda ed., 2001) and "Historical Body" in Nishida's *Collected Works of Kitarou Nishida* (Nishida, 1966). Keiichi Noe discussed the relationship between Nishida's theory of body and phenomenology (Noe, 1996).
- 5) Please refer to Noe's "The Body in History" and *Philosophy of Narrative* on his narrative theory (Noe, 1998 ; 2006). Noe's new book is the enlarged new edition, which includes commentaries on the main critiques of his theory (Noe, 2006). Please also refer to Danto (Danto, 2000)
- 6) Mind and body border each other so that they are inseparable.
- 7) Please refer to Ricoeur on the narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1996).

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